

*“Gospelizing” the Faithfulness of Christ  
Among the Gentiles:  
A Study of the Letters to the  
Galatians and Thessalonians*

Diocese of West Texas  
Spring & Fall 2010



Produced by The WorkShop,  
a ministry devoted to teaching faithful Christian practice  
in the light of the New Testament

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*General Introduction to the Course*

Bishop Lillibridge has invited the Diocese of West Texas, as a community of faith, to read and study Paul’s Letter to the Galatians in 2010, along with the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians. In last year’s study, the Diocese was invited to read Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

If you were a part of last year’s study, you will recall that Romans is often referred to as Paul’s most significant theological treatise – a kind of summary of his thoughts on Christian life and doctrine. Paul was not the founder of the church at Rome, however; nor had he ever visited the churches there. The letter he wrote to the Christians at Rome was intended as an introduction to his way of working with congregations. However, because Paul was the *founder* of the churches in Galatia and Thessalonica, his letters to these congregations provide many important and helpful insights into the ways that Paul nurtured the growth and health of congregations he knew well, and how he taught them, over time, about the daily life of faithfulness and discipleship.

## *This Study of Galatians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians*

This 12-session study consists of two sections:

1. An introduction to Galatians, followed by six study and reflection sessions on Galatians;
2. An introduction to the Thessalonian correspondence, followed by six study and reflection sessions on those two letters.

## *Outline of the Twelve Sessions*

### *Introduction to Galatians*

**Session one:** Galatians 1:1-10: Can “Gospel” be a Verb?

**Session two:** Galatians 1:11-24: “Gospeling” the Faithfulness of Christ

**Session three:** Galatians 2:1-21: Living by the Faithfulness of Christ

**Session four:** Galatians 3:1-4:11:

Becoming “Sons of God” Through Christ’s Faithfulness

**Session five:** Galatians 4:12-5:12: Faithfulness Working Through Love

**Session six:** Galatians 5:13-6:18: Walking in Line Behind the Spirit

### *Introduction to First and Second Thessalonians*

**Session seven:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10: Imitating Christ

**Session eight:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20: Being Entrusted with the Gospel

**Session nine:** 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13:

Being “Gospeled” by the Faithfulness of Others

**Session ten:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18: Encouraging One Another

**Session eleven:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28:

Proving Everything Through Testing

**Session twelve:** 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3:18:

Standing Firm and Holding Fast the Traditions

### *The Study of Galatians and the Thessalonian Correspondence*

**Our goal in this study is to enable us to read and study the letters to the Galatians and the Thessalonians in ways that are fresh and open to new possibilities for our lives.**

- Some of us have read and studied these letters before. But instead of *assuming* we already know the meaning of a letter or a particular passage, we will try to be like the very first recipients of the letters, *discovering* their many layers of meaning as we encounter the unfolding argument, passage by passage.
- We will read closely and pay attention to significant words and phrases that appear at important points throughout each letter.
- We will pay close attention to the unique ways that Paul interprets Jewish scripture – interpretations that possibly surprised and frustrated the Jewish-Christian leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

## *Overview of the Sessions*

In this study we will reflect on all three letters, with each one being read in sequence in its entirety, from start to finish. We will follow the same format for each of the twelve study and reflection sessions.

❖ **The first section of each session is entitled “A Translation for Study, with Commentary.”**

This section is our own translation of the original Greek text. The purpose of our translation is not a smooth reading in English, but as literal a rendering as possible from the Greek, to give you a sharper flavor of the original words. You might want to have your own favorite translation nearby, for comparison. Where we comment on particular Greek terms used, the Greek word will be sometimes be included inside brackets in the translation.

A note on translations: Most English translations balance several conflicting needs. Besides the desire to render a translation that is close to the sense of the original text, translators are usually also attempting to develop a text suitable for public reading in English-speaking churches, and are also paying homage to the Church’s theological traditions. Our translation has one purpose only: to give you, the student, the most access to the original Greek text. Sometimes you will find our translations awkward in English, or strange when compared to what you are used to. It is our hope that this awkwardness will be outweighed by delight in discovering a new freshness in Paul’s expressions in words closer to the sense of his original composition.

**Passage by passage, the translation is followed by relevant notes on the translation itself, and short commentary interpreting the passage.**

As with our study of Romans last year, we will see that in these letters Paul is often “playing” on certain Greek words, over and over again, that do not have precise English equivalents (faith/faithfulness, grace, covenant, justice/justification).

❖ **Questions for Reflection: Following the translation and commentary, the study provides some questions for reflection.**

The purpose of the questions is to help you focus on how these ancient letters might shape your own life in community and your discipleship in daily life.

*How to use this study*

These study sessions are designed for use by individuals, small groups, and classes.

The study arose out of our own doctoral work and many conversations about Galatians and the Thessalonian correspondence over the last five years, as we have taught together and led groups of laity in discernment of God's will in their daily lives. We hope, by offering it to you, to provoke similar conversations when you gather to study together.

In carrying out the study, we suggest that you use an entire week to work carefully through the passage for a single session, working on the questions for reflection toward the end of the week. Then gather with a small group to share the fruits of your study, to raise questions, to encourage one another, and to encounter Christ among you in holy conversation.

*For those who want to read more!*

This diocesan study does not require the purchase or use of any other books or written materials. Some people enjoy further study, however, and so we have made reference on occasion to the two books listed below. They

are in a commentary series written primarily for seminarians and pastors, but can be useful for any serious student of the New Testament:

1. Sam K. Williams, *Galatians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997)
2. Victor P. Furnish, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

These books are readily available through Amazon.com or by order through a local bookseller. Specific references in this study to quotations from Williams or Furnish will be designated by the author's name, followed by the page number (for example: Williams, 1).



*All of these tools* are spread out here for you to use in working toward your own understanding of these letters for your path of faithfulness in the context where you live. Our translations and interpretations are the fruit of our own wrestling with the text.

*But where you read it,  
with perhaps a small group of other Christians,  
Christ will also be in the midst of you,  
as he promised.*